When do voters support corrupt candidates for public office?

Preliminary Version: This paper is under active development. Results and conclusions may change as research progresses. *

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When will voters support a political candidate they suspect is corrupt? The results of prior research are complex and do not clearly explain voter support for corrupt candidates in recent elections. We use a conjoint survey experiment to study the link between candidate corruption and voter support in an American presidential primary election. Respondents view biographical vignettes with randomly selected characteristics for two candidates from their party, then choose which they would prefer as their party's presidential nominee. We are interested in (1) whether respondents (American registered voters) will react to media reports of a candidate's corruption, (2) whether partisanship leads respondents to value a candidate who can win the general election more than an honest candidate, (3) whether some forms of corruption (bribery, embezzlement, sextortion, or vote-buying) lead to greater loss of support than others, and (4) whether a candidate's gender changes the way that voters evaluate allegations of candidate corruption. We find that voters of all parties strongly prefer honest candidates, even if those candidates are less likely to win general elections, and punish some forms of misconduct more than others. They also weigh corruption allegations against women less seriously than those against men. Our findings, while optimistic about the deep reservoir of anti-corruption sentiment among American voters, suggest an urgent need to explain how politicians in non-corrupt consolidated democracies have overcome this barrier.

Keywords: corruption, experiment, gender

Introduction

When does a voter choose to support a candidate for public office who they suspect is involved in corruption? Generally speaking, surveys and survey experiments find strong public antipathy to corrupt candidates even where corruption is endemic. Yet recent events around the world suggest that this barrier has been overcome in places we would not generally expect. Consider Donald Trump, the former and current President of the

United States. Since first taking office in 2016, Trump has been repeatedly implicated in corruption. His attempted exchange of military aid to Ukraine for (real or invented) dirt on a political rival led directly to Trump's first impeachment. His attempt to pressure Republican elected officials in Georgia to "find" the votes he needed to win the state in the 2020 general election resulted in his indictment by a grand jury in Fulton County. Yet he remained the Republican party's candidate in 2024, defeating several primary challengers, and won re-election to the Presidency in November of that year.

The most obvious explanations for why voters might choose to support a corrupt candidate are a poor fit for the case of Donald Trump. For example, voters might support a corrupt candidate when corruption is so widespread that few non-corrupt alternatives are available. But the United States is a country with moderately low corruption according to comparative indicators; for example, in 2023 it ranked 24th out of 180 countries in control of corruption according to the Transparency International Corruption Perception index (Transparency International, 2023*b*). In all of Trump's campaigns, including the 2024 Republican primary campaign and the general election, suitably qualified alternatives without a history of corruption allegations were available yet not chosen. As another example, voters might allow corruption in exchange for receiving individual or collective clientelistic benefits, but there is little evidence that Trump provided such clientelistic benefits to large blocs of voters and no allegation of large-scale vote buying. A highly competent politician might be elected despite corruption because of the economic and strategic advantages they provide to the country, but the Trump administration's handling of the most substantial challenge of his first term—the global coronavirus pandemic that began in late 2019—led to widespread unemployment and high inflation. As for his second term, J.P. Morgan estimates a 60% chance of an economic recession in 2025 precipitated by Trump's trade policies (J.P. Morgan Global Research, 2025).

In this paper, we propose and test several explanations for voter support of corrupt politicians using a survey experiment fielded among American registered voters during

the summer of 2024. These explanations are based on existing theories of how and why voters choose (not) to support corrupt candidates. The experiment asked respondents to choose between two candidates in a Presidential primary election for their preferred party; thus, both candidates had the same partisan valence (and shared that valence with the respondent). Our experiment is designed to force respondents to make choices between realistic candidates that trade off between reasonably comparable costs and benefits without merely reproducing their preference for socially desirable opinions. First, **we examine whether American voters respond to journalistic reports of a candidate's involvement in corruption** by reducing their support for that candidate. Given rising skepticism of the media in the United States, voters (and especially Republicans) may not react to allegations of corruption that are uncovered by journalists; this could explain why voters continue to support corrupt candidates. Second, **we test the possibility that ideological polarization has made voters prioritize gaining power** above the regular and impartial administration of government. If voters think that winning is all-important, they may choose to support a corrupt candidate with the highest probability of winning the general election (and thus defeating the other party) over a clean candidate with a lesser chance of victory. It may be, for example, that Republican primary voters repeatedly chose Donald Trump over less-corrupt alternatives because they believed he was most likely to defeat the Democratic nominee. Third, **we investigate whether voters facing a choice among corrupt candidates might prefer candidates accused of some forms of corruption over others**. In 2016, voters choosing between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton may have believed that both candidates were susceptible to or actively engaged in corruption, but thought that Trump's possible misconduct (e.g., accepting foreign assistance to his Presidential campaign) was not as severe or damaging as Clinton's (e.g., evading public scrutiny of her actions while Secretary of State by operating a private e-mail server). Finally, **we examine whether voters use identity characteristics like gender as a shortcut for assessing the corruptibility of candidates**, either by holding women to

a higher standard (by withholding support from corrupt women more than corrupt men) or by discounting allegations of corruption among female candidates (compared to men accused of the same misconduct). In the two presidential elections that Donald Trump won, his opponents were women; perhaps voters were intrinsically more suspicious of those opponents and more likely to give Trump the benefit of the doubt.

We find that registered voters in a conjoint survey experiment strongly prefer honest candidates to those accused of any form of corruption when choosing between them in an American presidential primary election, regardless of the voter's partisanship. Respondents are at least 25 percentage points more likely to support a candidate with a reputation for honesty and integrity compared to candidates accused of bribery, sextortion, embezzlement, or vote-buying. Our respondents prefer candidates more likely to win the general election, particularly when both candidates have the same reputation for corruption, but this is not enough to compensate for lost support due to corruption. We also find that moral turpitude not constituting corruption (viz., marital infidelity) is treated more leniently: our respondents are between 16 and 85 percentage points more likely to support a candidate who cheated on their spouse compared to a candidate accused of corruption, even when that corruption involves sexual misconduct (viz., sextortion). Among the four forms of corruption we study, sextortion (demanding sexual favors in exchange for employment) and embezzlement (appropriation of campaign funds for personal uses) are more stigmatized than bribery or vote-buying. Thus, voters do draw distinctions among forms of misconduct and appear to punish some more than others. Finally, we find that the effect of corruption allegations on vote support is slightly *smaller* for women candidates compared to men, particularly for respondents who are Democrats or female: corrupt women candidates enjoy between 3 and 7 percentage points greater support compared to equivalent men.

On the positive side, our results indicate that American voters remain strongly averse to corrupt politicians. Their strong tendency to withhold support from potential Presi-

dential nominees of their party, even when alternatives are less likely to achieve victory over the other party in the general election, contrasts with their apparent willingness to accept anti-democratic tendencies among co-partisan politicians in experiments by Graham and Svolik (2020). The fact that they treat different forms of misconduct differently may explain some recent election outcomes where all major candidates were ethically flawed. However, the fact that candidates in recent elections have been able to overcome voter aversion to corruption when comparable, non-corrupt alternatives were available underscores the urgent need for new theories to explain when and why voters will choose to support corrupt candidates despite their reservations. We suggest some possibilities in the conclusion.

Background and Theory Development

Survey respondents in most countries report disliking corruption, even in democratic countries where corruption is widespread. In his meta-analysis of eighteen recent survey experiments, Incerti (2020) finds that participants in survey experiments are typically 32 percentage points less likely to support candidates accused of corruption. Incerti's finding is a good representation of the typical, very large effect of corruption on voter support in these experiments. So why do voters sometimes elect candidates who are corrupt? Incerti's meta-analysis of eight field experiments, where information about candidate corruption is randomly assigned to voters in a real election, finds that "the effect of providing information about incumbent corruption on corruption vote share in field experiments is approximately zero" (p. 761). Incerti concludes that "large effects in survey experiments are likely from social desirability bias and the lower and hypothetical nature of costs." He argues that "real-world candidates' attributes and policy profiles are not selected randomly, but rather represent choices designed to appeal to voters" (p. 770) and advocates for conjoint survey experiments that compare "realistic candidate profiles that target specific voters."

Still, some field experiments do find an effect. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2008) study the effect of randomly assigned federal audits of municipalities in Brazil; when these audits occur before an election, they find that corruption reduces incumbent re-election rates by at least seven percentage points more than comparable municipalities audited after the election.[1] Using a regression discontinuity design—not a field experiment, but with random assignment to treatment created by natural conditions—Klašnja (2015, p. 938) finds that a roughly 26 percentage point incumbency disadvantage (in probability of winning the election) faced by mayors in Romania is attributable to greater corruption among mayors with a greater legal incentive to be corrupt (viz., lower mayoral pay for smaller constituencies).

Moreover, observational studies more consistently find a negative relationship between corruption and voter support. For example, Peters and Welch (1980) find that incumbents in Congress between 1968 and 1978 accused of corruption lost between 6 and 11 percentage points of vote share; Welch and Hibbing (1997) found a effect of similar magnitude for Congressional incumbents between 1982 and 1990. Bågenholm (2013) found a somewhat smaller effect of corruption in European elections between 1981 and 2011, with parties implicated in corruption losing roughly four percentage points of voter support compared to clean parties (p. 603). In their study of the 1992 House of Representatives check-kiting scandal, Dimock and Jacobson (1995) find that incumbents who wrote bad checks suffered vote share losses in proportion to the extent of their malfeasance (p. 1148). More recently, Costas-Pérez, Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro (2012) finds that incumbents formally charged with corruption and with wide press coverage of the scandal lost more than 12 percentage points of vote share in the 2007 Spanish municipal elections (p. 477). Another study of Spanish local elections in 2011 finds that "parties affected by corruption lost an average of 1.8 percentage points" of vote share (Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero, 2016, p. 12). In his study of the 2009 House of Commons expenses scandal, Eggers

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[1]This estimate is based on comparing election results from 2004 in municipalities with two corruption violations audited before the election to those audited after the election.

(2014) finds that incumbents involved in the scandal lost about 2.5 percentage points of vote share on average compared to those not implicated (p. 14).

Based on this record, **we expect voters to prefer clean candidates over corrupt ones when presented with head-to-head comparisons between realistic candidates in a conjoint survey experiment,** because signaling this preference is a relatively low-cost decision and in keeping with past findings. But any new survey experiment needs to force respondents to make realistic decisions among choices that involve trade-offs with comparable costs and benefits. For example, we need to study factors that might weaken or negate a voter's distaste for corruption; Incerti (2020) notes that these moderators might explain why field and survey experiments have yielded different results (p. 768). We consider those potential moderators now.

Moderators of voter punishment for corruption

Which factors moderate or enhance the effect of corruption on voter support for candidates? We consider four possibilities drawn from the literature: a lack of corrupt alternatives, co-partisanship with a corrupt politician, a corrupt politician able to deliver economic benefits and public goods, and a lack of reliable information about a politician's involvement with corruption. Are these plausible explanations for recent election outcomes?

Lack of non-corrupt alternatives

Voters may not choose to vote against corrupt incumbents when they do not believe they have non-corrupt alternatives to whom they can switch support. This is essentially the finding of both de Figueiredo, Hidalgo and Kasahara (2023) and Chong et al. (2015), where disseminating information about incumbent corruption in mayoral elections tends to decrease voter turnout overall (but not relative support for the incumbent) because all major candidates are considered to be corrupt. A later survey experiment, also con-

ducted in Spain, finds that voters prefer a clean mayoral candidate to a corrupt candidate even when the corrupt option is an ideal match to the voter's political preferences; however, when both candidates are corrupt, many voters (up to 20 percentage points) are willing to support a corrupt candidate rather than abstain (Agerberg, 2020, pp. 267-270). Survey evidence from Brazil in 2007, supplemented with a 2016 survey experiment in the United States, indicates that tolerance for corruption among elected officials rises as the availability of clean alternative candidates falls (Pavão, 2018). Vera (2022) also analyzes a combination of observational panel survey data from Latin America and a survey experiment in Colombia and Peru, finding that a lack of "clarity of alternatives" (a stable and competitive electoral system) is associated with higher country-level corruption and greater individual-level support for corrupt candidates. However, Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker (2021) find that corrupt candidates in a survey experiment receive substantially reduced support from voters compared to clean candidates, even when corruption is widespread in the system (p. 166).

A lack of non-corrupt options may explain why, for example, Luiz Inácio da Silva or Silvio Berlusconi remained palatable to voters despite ample evidence of their involvement in corruption (Da Silva Marques, 2022; D'Emilo, 2023). But in the modern American context, voters usually have the opportunity to support a non-corrupt candidate. This is particularly true in party primary elections, where multiple candidates compete to win the party's nomination to compete in a (generally one-on-one) general election. When we present them with this opportunity in a conjoint survey experiment, we expect them to strongly prefer that option. Thus, we believe this mechanism does not provide a good explanation for Donald Trump's primary victories (especially in 2024).

However, it may explain some voter behavior in recent general elections for the American presidency. Democratic nominees Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris were also accused of ethical lapses during the 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. For Clinton, these allegations pertained to her use of a private e-mail server to avoid federal record-

keeping laws during her term as Secretary of State. For Harris, they pertained to her concealment of President Biden's declining health while she served as his Vice President. These accusations may explain voters' willingness to support Trump in those elections. We return to this possibility in our discussion of trade-offs for corruption below.

Ideological congruence and co-partisanship

We consider two reasons why voters might be less willing to abandon a corrupt politician with whom they share a party or ideology. First, the voter may perceive a simple trade-off between ideological and policy benefits provided by such a candidate against the corruption they will also bring. This tendency was found in survey experiments from the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s (Rundquist, Strom and Peters, 1977). In those experiments, respondents were shown information about two Congressional candidates and asked which they preferred. Then, the experimenters revealed that "a prominent member of their candidate's own party had withdrawn his endorsement... because of alleged illegal activities by the candidate while holding a previously elected position" (p. 957). Respondents were much less likely to switch their support to the other candidate if their initial (corrupt) choice shared their affiliation, domestic policy preferences, and especially their opinion about continuing the Vietnam War (p. 958). That basic finding has been repeatedly confirmed in many countries and over many time periods (e.g., Davis, Camp and Coleman, 2004; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2012; Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz, 2013; Eggers, 2014; Klašnja, 2017; Breitenstein, 2019; Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker, 2021; Jankowski, Juen and Lewandowsky, 2023; Jha, 2023). There has been at least one report of co-partisans being punished *more* for corruption than out-partisans, in a 2013 survey experiment from Greece (Konstantinidis and Xezonakis, 2013); this may have occurred because the corruption involved asking the respondent for a bribe, which might be perceived as violating the terms of client-patron relationships in that country (p. 559).

At a systemic level, overall political polarization has sometimes been advanced as a

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force that reduces corruption. The idea is that a moderate level of polarization increases the ideological threat presented by loss of control over government, which in turn raises the incentive that parties have to monitor and report their competitors for corruption (Brown, Touchton and Whitford, 2011; Melki and Pickering, 2020). By contrast, when all parties are ideologically similar, the benefits of colluding in a corrupt system (even as a part of a minority party) can outweigh the ideological or policy benefits of control over governance. On the other hand, high polarization can change the incentives of voters to value partisan control over government so highly that they would prefer corrupt members of their own party above clean members of the opposition (Eggers, 2014; Aarslew, 2023).

Ideological appeal might explain why Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, and his Fidesz party have maintained high levels of public approval through 2022 (Nezopont Intezet, 2021; Clancy, 2022) despite a dramatic increase in government corruption since taking office in 2010 (Transparency International, 2023*a*). Orbán has won re-election three times over this period on a platform of anti-immigrant nationalism despite expanding clientelism and cronyism in public procurement (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016; Tóth, 2022). But ideological polarization is not a strong *prima facie* explanation of why Trump won Republican primary elections, especially the 2024 primary election. By 2024, allegations of corruption against Donald Trump were well-known (having been publicized by two impeachments). Both his style and policy commitments were relatively commonplace in the Republican party and among potential primary challengers at that time, giving voters viable alternatives untainted by those allegations. Even in 2016, there were candidates (like Senator Ted Cruz) who were ideologically and stylistically similar to Trump but without his baggage.

Maybe ideological polarization among American voters—having risen steadily since the 1950s—has reached a level where "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Overman, 1999). If this is true, we would expect voters to strongly, perhaps even lexi-

cographically, prefer the candidate with the highest probability of winning in the general election. Republican primary voters in 2016, 2020, and 2024 may have simply believed that Donald Trump (whatever his flaws) was the candidate most likely to win against the likely Democratic nominee. Thus, when presented with an honest candidate from their own party with a lower chance of winning, **we anticipate that voters will prefer a corrupt candidate from their own party with a higher chance of winning.**

Second, voters may perceive information about corruption among co-partisans as being untrustworthy or itself motivated by partisan bias. For example, Beaulieu (2014, p. 24) finds that "individual concerns for [electoral] fraud are shaped [by] a desire for their preferred candidate to win" in survey data from the 2011 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz (2013) finds substantially more support for a corrupt incumbent in a 2011 survey experiment in Catalonia when the accused incumbent receives the backing of their own party compared to when the party withdraws support, indicating that "partisans are much more willing to support a politician charged with corruption if the party signals that the accusation is a partisan trick devised by the opposition" (p. 609).

In the United States, skepticism and distrust of media has become so widespread that voters may discount information about political corruption that they receive from journalists. If this is true, then allegations of corruption that result from investigative journalism may not change voter support because the voters do not believe it. **The corruption information we present in our survey experiment is attributed to journalists, and we are interested in whether this information will be effective in reducing voter support for candidates despite the attribution**. We expect partisanship to moderate this relationship in the American context, as Republican attacks on the media as an institution are now commonplace. We therefore **investigate whether partisanship moderates respondents' willing to sanction corrupt politicians on the basis of journalistic evidence** provided in our experiment.

Trade-offs for corruption and relative harm

Voters might be willing to support a corrupt candidate if they receive something tangible from that candidate that they cannot get from clean candidates. Direct payoffs and preferential access to public goods and services are one option, and voters have been shown to support leaders from whom they receive such benefits through client-patron relationships (Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Weschle, 2016). But widespread clientelism has not been a substantial influence on American voters since the middle of the twentieth century. They might also be willing to support corrupt politicians who are exceptionally competent, able to provide sound economic management and ample public goods (Konstantinidis and Xezonakis, 2013; Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga, 2013; Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero, 2016; Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego, 2016; Breitenstein, 2019; Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker, 2021; Zhu and Yang, 2023), although not every study has found voters willing to make this tradeoff (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013). In particular, voters in low-corruption countries seem less willing to tolerate corruption in exchange for economic performance (Klašnja and Tucker, 2013).

We do not know whether American voters prioritized competence over corruption in choosing Trump. But we suspect that **voters might perceive some forms of corruption—corruption that does not directly harm them—as less important** than forms with a greater negative impact. This could be important when voters are comparing options that they believe are all contaminated by corruption, as they may have done during the 2016 and 2024 American presidential general election. Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero (2016) found that corruption that benefits or is neutral toward the public good does not damage voter support as much as corruption that harms the public; they identify fraud in procurement, embezzlement, illegal hiring of municipal personnel, and blackmail (p. 9) as welfare-decreasing forms of corruption. We consider vote-buying and sextortion as two forms of corruption that may be considered less directly harmful to the public by voters. Vote-buying is a form of corruption that directly benefits at least those voters

who received payment and does not directly infringe on voter autonomy (Mares and Visconti, 2020, p. 315). Sextortion, while harmful to the target of the abuse, is a relatively "private" transaction that does not directly impact the wider public. Perhaps Donald Trump's alleged misdeeds (sexual and otherwise) were considered relatively benign by general election voters compared to the alleged misdeeds of his opponents.

Trustworthy information about corruption

In order to punish corrupt politicians, it is necessary (although not sufficient) for voters to know which politicians are corrupt (De Vries and Solaz, 2017). Prior studies have highlighted the importance of reliable, targeted information about corruption in enabling voter punishment of corrupt governments. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2008) finds that the effect of randomized municipal corruption audits on Brazilian mayoral elections is strongly contingent on the presence of a local radio station that can publicize the results. Subsequent research has repeatedly verified the importance of information in enabling voter punishment of corrupt politicians at the ballot box (e.g., Chang, Golden and Hill, 2010; Costas-Pérez, Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro, 2012; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego, 2016; Klašnja, 2017; Mares and Visconti, 2020).

Again, on the surface this seems like a poor explanation for voter behavior in consolidated democracies with essentially unrestricted media ecosystems that can identify and publicize corruption. However, as we noted above, American distrust of journalists has become widespread—especially among Republicans. In the absence of definitive evidence, voters might instead rely on informational short-cuts to infer whether corruption allegations are credible. If they believe women are generally less corrupt than men, they may tend to favor women candidates when all options seem corrupt. Or perhaps the electorate will punish corruption more harshly when it violates gender stereotypes compared to when it is consistent with those stereotypes; in this instance, we would expect

voters to be less likely to support a corrupt female politician compared to an equivalent corrupt man. Observational studies of aggregate corruption in a country have argued that women politicians are less corrupt because voters hold them to a higher standard than men (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). However, the results of direct studies of voter behavior are decidedly mixed. Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner (2018) finds that male voters treat corrupt politicians of both genders equally, but female voters punish corrupt female politicians more strongly. But while studying voters in Latin America, Le Foulon and Reyes-Housholder (2021) find that corrupt female candidates may actually be *preferred* to corrupt men in some instances; in most cases, they find no gender difference. Schwindt-Bayer, Esarey and Schumacher (2018) find no difference at all in how voters in the United States or Brazil treat corrupt male and female candidates.

Consequently, we have uncertain expectations about the effect of a candidate's gender in our survey experiment. We do believe that **voters will react differently to corruption allegations depending on the candidate's gender**, and we have some reasons to expect that **this reaction may be contingent on the respondent's own gender**, but the literature provides inconsistent guidance on what relationships we might expect. We also investigate whether **Republicans and Democrats will respond differently to candidate gender** given partisan differences in trust of the media; Republicans might be more likely to rely on stereotypes or shortcuts about what corrupt candidates look like if they believe they do not have access to reliable information.

Summary of theoretical expectations

To summarize our expectations:

1. Voters will prefer the candidate with the highest chance of winning the general election.

2. Voters will prefer candidates with a reputation for honesty and integrity over those alleged to be involved with corruption.

3. Voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the nature of the corruption in which the candidate is alleged to be involved.

4. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the gender of the candidate.

5. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the gender of the voter.

6. Voters will lexicographically prefer candidates with a higher probability of winning the general election, regardless of their other characteristics.

7. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the partisanship of the voter.

8. The moderating effect of candidate gender on the corruption-voter support relationship will differ depending on the partisanship of the respondent.

We now move onto an empirical examination of voter behavior in a conjoint survey experiment.[2]

Research Design

We conducted an online conjoint survey experiment using the Qualtrics XM platform and randomization software created by Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014).[3] Participants were asked to choose between two candidates for their party's nominee for the United States Presidential election based on short biographical profiles of each candidate. The survey was taken by a sample of 1010 adult United States residents who were also

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[2]Hypotheses 1 through 6 were pre-registered prior to fielding the survey (Esarey and Linker, 2024). Hypothesis 7 was noted as an "exploratory analysis" in the pre-registration plan. Hypothesis 8 was added as a further exploratory analysis based on results uncovered during our examination of the data.

[3]Gender was not randomly assigned via the Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) software, but was instead randomly chosen by the Qualtrics platform. Two identical vignettes were prepared for each candidate, one male and one female, and one was randomly selected to be shown to the survey respondent.

registered voters. Dynata advertised our survey to members of their online panel in proportion to their age, gender, and race/ethnicity so that the sample would approximate the demographic characteristics of registered voters in the November 2020 Current Population Survey. We fielded the experiment during the summer of 2024. Our experiment was designed to measure how voters react when potential candidates are engaged in corruption, and also how these choices are influenced by the gender of the candidate and the probability that the candidate wins the general election. We randomly assigned many features of the candidates' biographical profiles for each respondent, most crucially:

1. whether they were allegedly involved in corruption (and if so, what kind);
2. the candidate's probability of winning the general election if they were selected; and
3. the candidate's gender.

The survey began with three screening questions ensuring that each participant was an adult resident of the United States who is registered to vote; those who did not pass this screening were excluded from further participation. The next page of the survey asked a series of demographic questions about gender, age range, income range, race, political party affiliation, and education. Then, participants were shown a series of three pairs of candidate biographical profiles with randomly assigned characteristics. For each pair of candidates, participants were asked an attention check question pertaining to a piece of information from one of the profiles. Finally, they were asked which of the two candidates they would prefer to be their party's nominee for President. Other than the screening questions, respondents could leave responses blank but would be prompted to confirm they wanted to skip the question if they did so. The full survey instrument (with randomly assigned characteristics for the candidate profiles in place) can be found in the online appendix.

Each candidate profile has seven randomly assigned characteristics. A sample pair of candidate profiles is shown in Figure 1. The primary focus of the experiment was on the three characteristics enumerated above: a candidate's alleged involvement in corruption,

their probability of winning the general election, and their gender. We also randomly assigned information about each candidate's education, political experience, profession, and home state (with candidates never from the same state). A full list of options for all randomized characteristics is available in the online appendix.

Figure 1: **A sample pair of candidate profiles**. Highlights and superscripts correspond to the randomized attributes within each candidate's biographical vignette. These are: (1) involvement in corruption; (2) probability of winning the general election; (3) gender; (4) education; (5) political experience; (6) profession; (7) home state of the first candidate; (8) home state of the second candidate. The full list of possibilities for each randomized characteristic is available in an appendix.

Candidate 1: Charles[3] Johnson is a 55 year old physician[6] from Arizona[7] who graduated from MIT[4]. In addition to his[3] career as a physician[6], Charles[3] has also served as their state's Governor[5].

Journalists investigated Charles's[3] background when he[3] announced his[3] candidacy. These investigations revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity[1].

Election forecasters predict that Charles[3] has an 80%[2] chance of winning the general election if he[3] is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Elizabeth[3] Smith is a 53 year old lawyer[6] from Florida[8] who graduated from Yale University[4]. In addition to her[3] career as a lawyer[6], Elizabeth[3] has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate[5].

When Elizabeth[3] announced her[3] intention to run for office, journalists investigated her background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars[1].

Election forecasters predict that Elizabeth[3] has a 20%[2] chance of winning the general election if she[3] is the party's nominee.

Every candidate's biographical vignette included one of six corruption-related pieces of information. This information is preceded with a sentence saying that journalists had investigated the background of the candidate in connection with their presidential candi-

dacy. Each vignette then says "These investigations revealed…" followed by one of six possible descriptions, which are provided in Table 1. The first five possibilities are forms of corruption (or, in the case of the first possibility, no involvement with corruption).

The vignettes in our experiment are designed to represent realistic candidates for office while focusing the respondent's attention on certain trade-offs of theoretical interest. The experiment presents both candidates as members of the respondent's party, competing in a primary election; this channels the effect of in-group favoritism or partisanship into each candidate's possibility of winning the general election (and thus defeating the nominee of the opposing party). Thus, it **focuses respondents on a trade-off that voters make between a candidate's alleged involvement with corruption and their ability to win office**; we can measure the degree to which voters value the benefits of political victory over the costs associated with condoning corruption at the highest level of office. It also allows us to see **how voters behave in situations where all candidates are corrupt and they are forced to trade-off some forms of corruption against others**. One of the treatments (marital infidelity) is not a form of corruption per se, as it does not involve abuse of public office; this treatment allows us to **compare voters' reaction to corruption with a sexual component (sextortion) to a form of sexual immorality with no such component (infidelity)**.

Last, we want to know how candidate gender and corruption interact when influencing voters' support of allegedly corrupt candidates. To accomplish this, we compare the effect of corruption and electoral win probability treatments among male candidates to the same effects among female candidates; each candidate's gender is randomly assigned. By collecting information about the respondent's gender, we can also determine whether men and women voters weigh corruption differently in their decision making.

The conjoint survey design facilitates a relatively straightforward analysis of the data. The average marginal component effect (AMCE) of each treatment can be discerned with a simple ordinary least squares regression populated with dummy variables correspond-

Table 1: **Primary candidate characteristics**. This table shows the options available for a candidate's corruption involvement, probability of winning the general election, and their gender. One selection from each list was randomly assigned to the candidate's biographical vignette as shown to survey respondents.

1. Corruption Types

a	the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity
b	allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies
c	allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars
d	allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate has paid voters in exchange for their support at the ballot box
e	a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship
f	allegations of recent marital infidelity by a former lover

2. Probability of Winning

a	20%
b	50%
c	80%

3. Gender

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a	Male
b	Female

ing to each treatment. We omit the baseline category (honest, female candidates with a 50% chance of winning the general election) if we wish to estimate this AMCE. We can include the baseline category (and exclude the constant intercept) if we wish to present estimates of the average probability of supporting a candidate in a particular treatment condition. However, pairwise comparisons among observations with a specific configuration of treatment conditions are of special interest because of their theoretical importance; we thus often compare subsets of observations to show respondent behavior when making certain trade-offs that we wish to study. Because each respondent saw three different choice tasks, we speculate that there may be unmodeled residual correlation in their responses; we therefore estimate a regression using a CR2-type clustered variance-covariance matrix using `lm_robust` in the `estimatr` library (Blair et al., 2024).

Results

We begin with a simple pairwise comparison of each of six corruption-related information treatments. This is shown in Figure 2. Each box shows the proportion of respondents who supported the candidate whose treatment is listed in the row, when that candidate was matched against an opponent whose treatment is listed in the column. If the candidate and their opponent are equally preferred, that candidate will receive 50% support from the respondents; this is therefore our expectation under the null hypothesis that the treatments are comparable. The 95% confidence intervals presented under the estimated proportions are based on standard errors clustered on respondent from a constant linear regression.[4]

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[4]Our analysis excluded any respondents who clicked through the experiment in fewer than 60 seconds or failed screening checks for age and status as a registered American voter, leaving a total of 1010 respondents who were presented with 3030 choices. Of these, 2225 had correct attention checks and non-missing candidate choices (76.41% of all decisions made) while 687 had incorrect attention checks with non-missing candidate choices (or 23.59% of decisions made) for a total of 2912 decisions (corresponding to 5824 candidates) where respondents made a valid candidate choice. We include all these observations in our main text results; alternative analyses of only those responses corresponding to correct attention checks are included in an appendix where indicated in the text.

Figure 2: **Pairwise Comparison of Support for Candidate by Treatment, with 95% Confidence Intervals**. Each box shows the probability respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed in the row when compared to a candidate whose treatment condition is listed in the column. The bracketed values are 95% confidence intervals from a constant regression using CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.
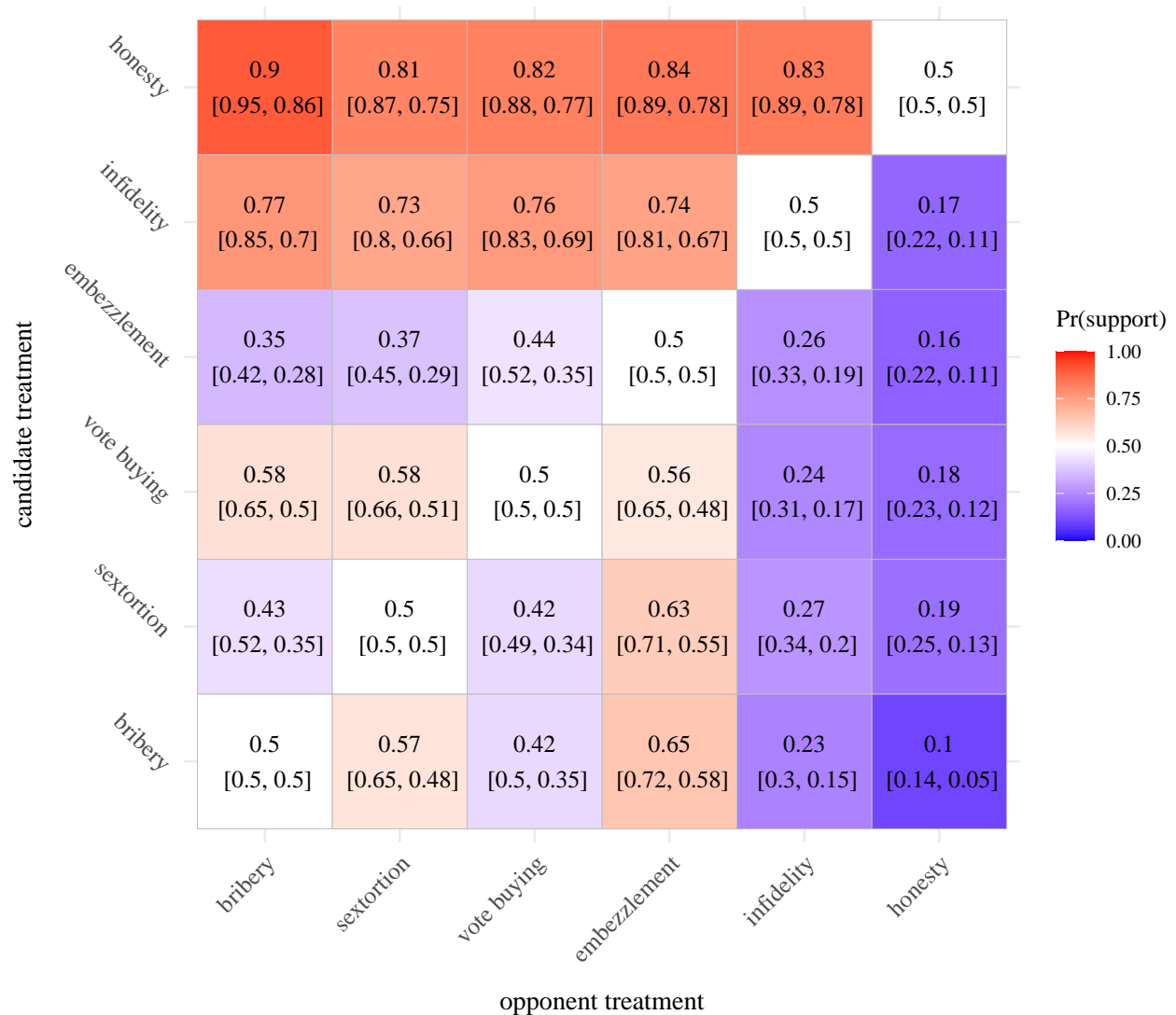
An honest candidate is always strongly preferred by our respondents, receiving more than 80% support (averaging over all other randomly assigned characteristics) against an opponent under any other condition. A maritally unfaithful, but not politically corrupt, candidate is the next most preferred, receiving more than 70% support against anyone other than an honest opponent. Candidates accused of vote-buying appear to be third most-favored, as a majority of respondents favor a candidate accused of vote-buying over one accused of bribery, sextortion, or embezzlement; however, this preference is relatively weak and in some cases statistically insignificant.[5] Embezzlement is the most damaging background for a candidate; candidates with any other background are preferred.[6]

Model 1 in Table 2 shows the AMCE for each of the corruption-related treatments relative to the baseline condition (honesty), controlling for the candidate's gender and their probability of winning the general election. In every case, the coefficient on the treatment condition is negative and statistically significant. While marital infidelity lowers support for a candidate by about 19 percentage points (on average), all forms of corruption are associated with a substantively much larger decline in support between 36 and 44 percentage points.[7]

We are also interested in whether female candidates are hald to a higher standard compared to men. Figure 3 shows estimates of the probability that respondents support a candidate for each of the six corruption-related information treatments, separately estimated for male and female candidates. There is very little substantive difference in support for men and women candidates in any treatment, although women receive slightly higher support in the infidelity, sextortion, and embezzlement treatments compared to men. None of these effects is statistically significant according to Model 3 in Table 2. Overall, we find that female candidates are on average slightly preferred over men (by

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[5]Unless otherwise noted, significance tests are $\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed.

[6]See Appendix Figure 7 for an analysis using only responses with correct attention checks; it supports similar conclusions.

[7]Appendix Table 3 shows results only for observations corresponding to correct attention checks, and supports similar conclusions.

Table 2: **Treatment Effect Estimates with Gender Interactions**. The table shows the relationship between experimental treatments and respondent support for a candidate using an OLS regression model with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Intercept	0.814***	0.802***	0.802***	0.815***	0.803***
	(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.022)
infidelity	−0.192***	−0.176***	−0.171***	−0.192***	−0.171***
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.021)	(0.028)
embezzlement	−0.439***	−0.423***	−0.420***	−0.439***	−0.420***
	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.028)
vote buying	−0.359***	−0.344***	−0.351***	−0.359***	−0.351***
	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.022)	(0.029)
sextortion	−0.385***	−0.370***	−0.362***	−0.385***	−0.362***
	(0.021)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.021)	(0.029)
bribery	−0.377***	−0.362***	−0.371***	−0.377***	−0.371***
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.029)	(0.021)	(0.029)
Male candidate	−0.025*	−0.030*	0.002	−0.026	0.000
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.026)	(0.022)	(0.032)
Male candidate x honesty		0.032			
		(0.029)			
infidelity x Male candidate			−0.042		−0.042
			(0.039)		(0.039)
embezzlement x Male candidate			−0.038		−0.038
			(0.039)		(0.039)
vote buying x Male candidate			−0.016		−0.016
			(0.042)		(0.042)
sextortion x Male candidate			−0.049		−0.049
			(0.040)		(0.040)
bribery x Male candidate			−0.015		−0.015
			(0.040)		(0.040)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	−0.059***	−0.059***	−0.059***	−0.059**	−0.060**
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.022	0.022
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Pr(win) = 20% x Male candidate				0.001	0.001
				(0.030)	(0.030)
Pr(win) = 80% x Male candidate				0.004	0.003
				(0.031)	(0.031)
Num.Obs.	5824	5824	5824	5824	5824
R2	0.099	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.100
AIC	7863.8	7864.8	7871.8	7867.7	7875.8
BIC	7930.5	7938.2	7971.8	7947.8	7989.2

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

about 2.5 percentage points in Model 1 of Table 2) and that men and women are equally preferred when candidates are honest (see Model 2 of Table 2).

Figure 3: **Average Support for Candidates by Treatment and Candidate Gender, with 95% Confidence Intervals**. Each point represents the probability that respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed on the left axis. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression (excluding the intercept) with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 4.
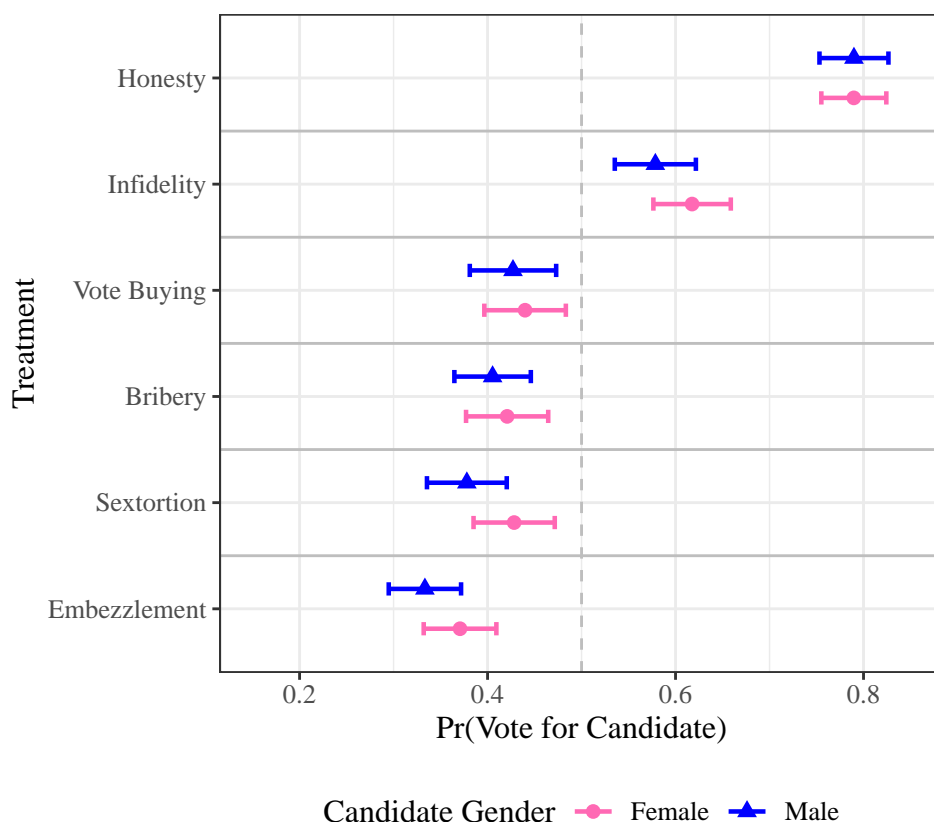
We find some evidence that female respondents are more likely to disproportionately punish male candidates for corruption while male respondents are not. This is shown in Figure 4, which shows the AMCE of male candidate gender on support separately for male and female respondents. Pink lines show the AMCE and 95% confidence interval for female respondents, while blue lines show the same for male respondents. In the honesty treatment, both men and women respondents treat men and women candidates equally. However, when the candidate is accused of corruption, women respondents tend

to disproportionately withold support from male candidates. Male respondents continue to treat candidates of both genders equally.

Figure 4: **Effect of Candidate Gender on Support by Treatment and Respondent Gender**. Each point represents the AMCE of being a male candidate in the honesty treatment or in any other condition. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 5.
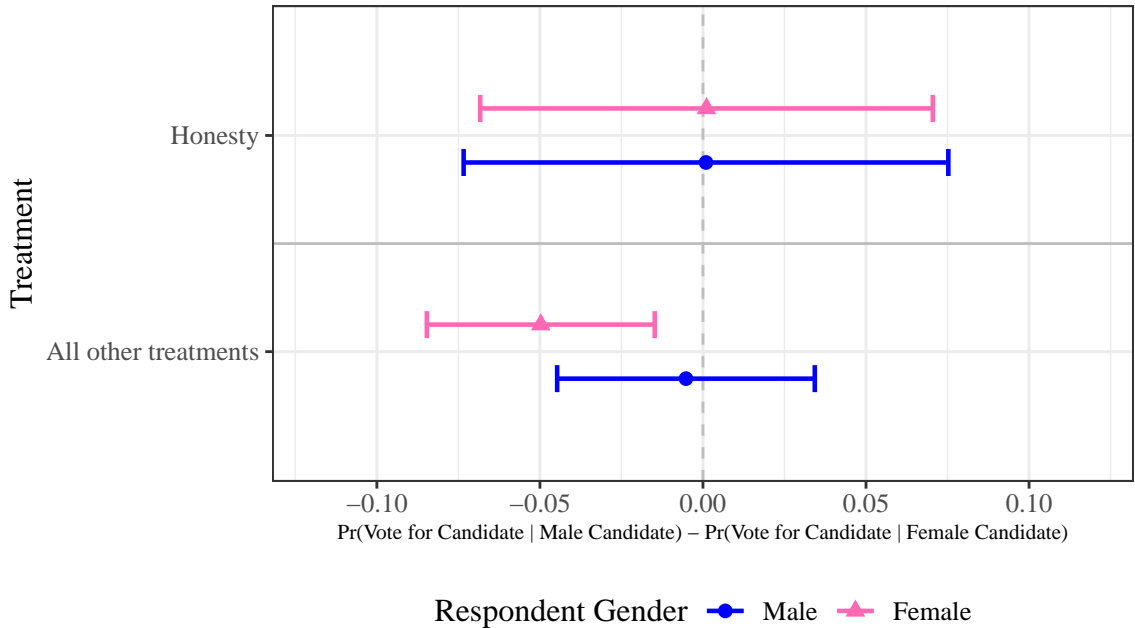
According to Table 2, candidates with a higher probability of winning the general election are preferred by our respondents. However, the substantive size of this difference is surprisingly small compared to the impact of the corruption-related information treatments. A candidate with an even chance of winning the general election is preferred by about 6 percentage points more compared to one with a 20% chance of winning. A candidate with an 80% chance of winning the general election enjoys about an 8 percentage point advantage over a candidate with a 20% chance of winning. These differences are shown in the left panel of Figure 5, which shows the proportion of our survey respondents who chose the candidate with the probability of winning listed on the left side (separately estimated by candidate gender). We find no statistically significant indication that the probability of winning influenced male and female candidates differently (see

Model 4 in Table 2). The effect of a candidate's win probability on respondent support is much stronger if we compare only candidates with the same corruption information and different win probabilities (in the right panel of Figure 5). The uncertainty of these estimates is increased because there are far fewer observations available for this restricted case (N = 642) as compared to the left panel (N = 5824).

Figure 5: **Average Support for Candidates, By Probability of Winning General Election**. Each point represents the probability that respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed on the left axis. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression (excluding the intercept) with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The left panel shows estimates for the full data set, while the right panel shows estimates for cases where both candidates have been randomly assigned the same corruption information treatment. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 6.
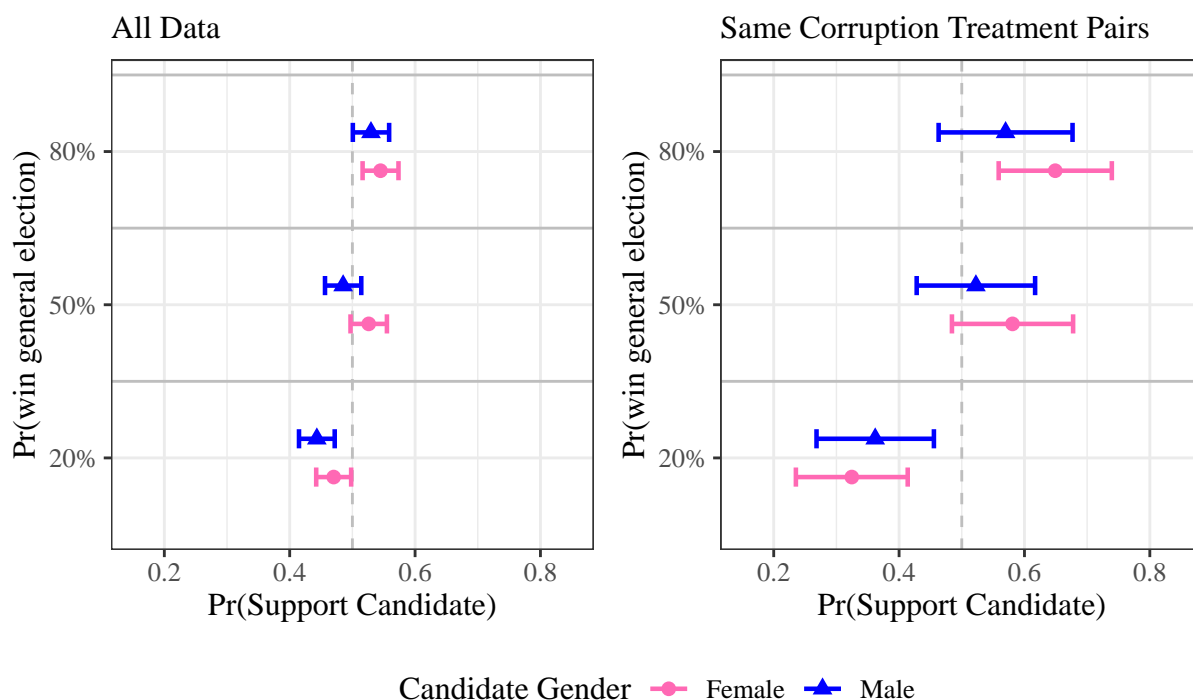
Finally, we want to know whether Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are equally averse to corruption in their political candidates; recall that this is important because Republicans may distrust journalists' reports of corruption more than others, and might rely on heuristics to identify corrupt candidates as a result. Figure 6 shows average support for candidates conditional on the candidate's gender. Point estimates and 95%

Figure 6: **Average Support for Candidates by Treatment, Candidate Gender, and Respondent Partisanship**. Each point represents the probability that respondents with self-reported partisanship listed in the column chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed in the row. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression on the matching set of partisan respondents with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 7.
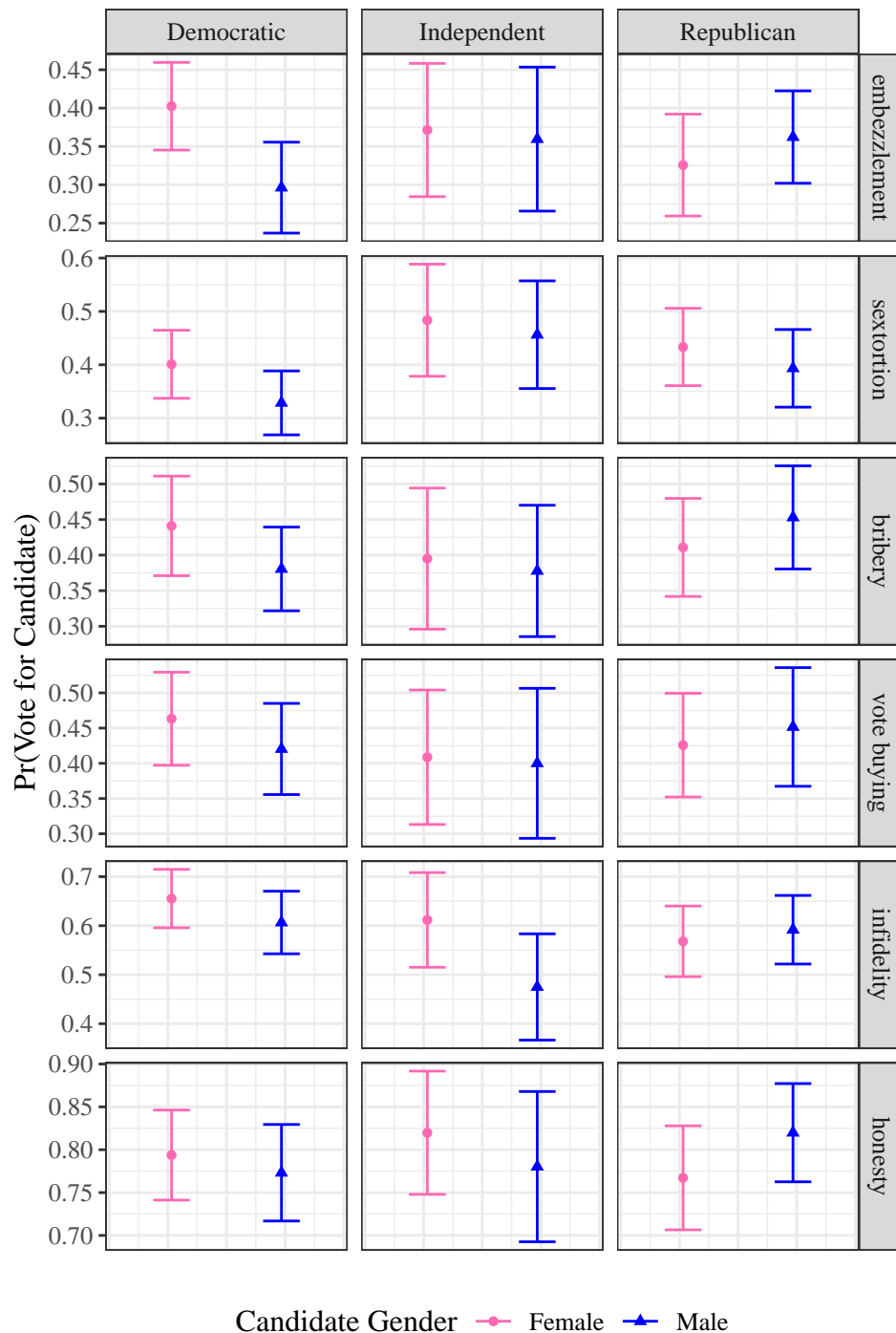
confidence intervals candidates for male candidates are colored blue while those for female candidates are pink. The figure shows only minor partisan differences in support for a candidate by treatment. However, there does appear to be a somewhat consistent pattern of Democratic partisans preferring female candidates more than equivalent men while Republican partisans treat them more equally or even slightly prefer male candidates. This difference is statistically significant, as shown in Appendix Table 9 and Figure 8. The most strongly partisan Democrats preferred women candidates over men in our experiment by a little more than seven percentage points, but there was no effect of candidate gender among Independents or Republicans. Thus, Republicans in our sample do not seem to be particularly distrustful of corruption allegations made against politicians that come from journalists, and there is no evidence that they use the heuristic shortcut of gender to compensate for that distrust.

Conclusion

Let us return to the puzzle with which we began this paper: why have voters recently elected candidates implicated in corruption, including in low-corruption consolidated democracies like the United States? We studied several possible alternative explanations for these events that draw on scholarship: whether American voters value winning the general election over all other priorities, whether voters in general (and Republicans in particular) might discount information coming from journalists, whether some forms of corruption might be more discounted compared to others, and whether women candidates might be held to a higher standard than men (especially by Republicans who might be relying on heuristic shortcuts to identify corruption in the absence of reliable information). Many of these explanations were not borne out in our survey experiment. Respondents did *not* lexicographically prefer winning elections over an honest reputation; corruption was *more important* than winning to them. They did not ignore information about corruption provided by journalists, regardless of partisanship. Women candidates

were slightly *advantaged* over men when suspected over corruption, not held to a higher standard, and this advantage came from Democratic respondents (not Republicans). Voters were more willing to tolerate non-corrupt moral turpitude compared with corruption, and that some forms of corruption (e.g., vote-buying) were treated as less serious than others (e.g., embezzlement); this may partially explain why voters in some recent general elections were willing to support candidates with apparent flaws. But this does not explain why corrupt candidates have succeeded when competing against clean alternatives, such as in recent primary elections for the American presidency.

We think our results highlight an urgent need to study voter tolerance for corruption. Our current explanations are at best incomplete, and the stakes are high. Pervasive corruption is notoriously hard to overcome (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2013)—the United States took decades to emerge from Gilded Age corruption and become a comparatively clean state (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022)—and thus preventing reversals is crucial in order avoid falling into a pattern that could hurt the public for generations. We believe that two avenues of inquiry are particularly promising.

First, we did not study anti-systemic or populist appeal. Corrupt politicians might be tolerated by voters precisely because they ignore and undermine institutions, including institutions related to corruption. Low trust in institutions and economic inequality have already been established as both causes and effects of corruption (for an overview, see You, 2018). Increased tolerance of corruption by voters dissatisfied with the status quo may be a mechanism by which these factors increase corruption. This is essentially the explanation that Chayes (2016) offers for Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election. Voters may not care about corruption in a system that they wish to undermine or destroy, and a politician unconcerned with rules or norms—including rules and norms against corruption—could be seen as the ideal instrument for this agenda.

Second, a desire to favor in-groups (co-ethnics, co-partisans, those with similar lifestyles, etc.) with government policy may also be a cause of tolerance for corruption. This

might occur because such policies are so important to these voters that they are willing to tolerate other behaviors, like corruption, that they oppose; this is similar to an argument made by Graham and Svolik (2020) about the willingness of American voters to trade off the integrity of democratic institutions for direct policy benefits. There may also be a more direct psychological link between the desire to favor in-groups (or hurt out-groups) and to disregard self-dealing or corruption; previous research has certainly drawn such a connection to disregard for democracy (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996). Our survey experiment would not have discovered such an association because our candidates' vignettes did not mention their personal racial or ethnic identity or their stances on identity-related issues.

We conclude on an optimistic note: our survey experiment finds robust opposition to corruption among American voters and a willingness to accept losing an election in order to prevent a corrupt politician from gaining power. While our respondents were 6-8 percentage points more likely to support surer general election winners than likely losers, the loss in support faced by corrupt candidates was between 3 and 6 times larger. This result contrasts with the results of Graham and Svolik (2020), who found that respondents were relatively unwilling to withdraw their support from candidates with an anti-democratic agenda to support an alternative with less palatable economic and social policies. It is reassuring to know that American voters on the whole remain committed in principle to choosing politicians who prioritize the public good over their personal gain. But the disconnect between behavior in our experiment and behavior in recent elections highlights the need for future research to uncover how this commitment has been subverted.

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Appendix: Full Survey Instrument (with example treatments)

WAKE FOREST
UNIVERSITY

You are being invited to participate in a research study being done by Justin Esarey and Molly Linker of Wake Forest University (in Winston-Salem, NC). The purpose of this research study is to study how people decide which political candidates to support.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an on-line survey/questionnaire. This survey/questionnaire will ask you to answer some demographic questions about yourself, and also to choose between pairs of hypothetical candidates for President of the United States based on short biographical sketches. We anticipate that this survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You will receive compensation as reported to you by Dynata; your compensation will not depend on the choices you make during the study. In addition, we hope that your participation in the study will help us understand more about why voters choose to support certain candidates for political office. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any on-line related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. We will minimize any risks by collecting only de-identified data (i.e., Dynata will not link IP addresses, names, or e-mail addresses to the responses of this survey). Data will be maintained on password-protected computers and on-line services (e.g., Dropbox accounts and Qualtrics accounts) accessible only to those researchers affiliated with the project and to the services themselves. De-identified data (without IP addresses, names, or e-mail addresses) will be shared with other researchers via posting to public websites for replication purposes and secondary use.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose (other than questions verifying your eligibility to participate in the study).

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Justin Esarey (e-mail: esareyje@wfu.edu or telephone: 1-336-758-5133). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you should contact the IRB at Wake Forest University at irb@wfu.edu and reference study number IRB00025630. We encourage you to print or save a copy of this page for future reference.

By continuing on with the survey, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, living in the United States, are registered to vote in the United States, have read and understood this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study. If you do not wish to participate, please close your browser window.

If you wish to participate in this study, please click the arrow button below to start the survey.

Are you at least 18 years old?

○ Yes
○ No

Are you currently living in the United States of America?

○ Yes
○ No

Are you currently registered to vote in elections in the United States of America?

○ Yes
○ No

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

The questions on this page are about your demographics. Please answer these questions before continuing to the next page.

What is your gender?

○ Male
○ Female
○ Other (specify)

[   ]

What is your age?

○ 18 - 24 years
○ 25 - 34 years
○ 35 - 44 years
○ 45 - 54 years
○ 55- 64 years
○ 65 - 74 years
○ 75+ years

Are you Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin?

○ Yes
○ No

What race do you consider yourself? (You may select more than one option.)

☐ White
☐ Black or African American
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
☐ Other (specify)

[   ]

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?

○ Strongly Democratic
○ Not very strongly Democratic
○ Independent, closer to Democratic
○ Independent
○ Independent, closer to Republican
○ Not very strongly Republican
○ Strongly Republican

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

○ Less than High School
○ High school graduate
○ Some college but no degree
○ Associate's Degree (for example: AA, AS)
○ Bachelor's Degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
○ Master's Degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MSW, MBA)
○ Professional school Degree (for example: MD, DDS, LLB, JD)
○ Doctorate Degree (for example: PhD, EdD)
○ Other (specify)

[   ]

What was the total income in 2023 of all your family members living in your household? This figure should include income from all sources, including salaries, wages, pensions, Social Security, dividends, interest, and all other income.

○ $0 - $24,999
○ $25,000 - $49,999
○ $50,000 - $74,999
○ $75,000- $99,999
○ $100,000 - $149,999
○ $150,000-$199,999
○ $200,000-$249,999
○ $250,000 or more

When you have answered all the questions on this page, click the arrow button below to continue the survey.

Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Charles Johnson is a 55 year old physician from Arizona who graduated from MIT. In addition to his career as a physician, Charles has also served as their state's Governor.

Journalists investigated Charles's background when he announced his candidacy. These investigations revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Election forecasters predict that Charles has an 80% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Elizabeth Smith is a 53 year old lawyer from Florida who graduated from Yale University. In addition to her career as a lawyer, Elizabeth has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate.

When Elizabeth announced her intention to run for office, journalists investigated her background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

Election forecasters predict that Elizabeth has a 20% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: Investigations into the background of _____ revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

○ Candidate 1 (Johnson)
○ Candidate 2 (Smith)
○ both candidates
○ neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

○ Candidate 1 (Johnson)
○ Candidate 2 (Smith)

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Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Ted Brown is a 56 year old political commentator from Georgia who graduated from Cal Tech. In addition to his career as a political commentator, Ted has also served as their state's Governor.

When Ted announced his intention to run for office, journalists investigated his background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

Election forecasters predict that Ted has an 80% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Jeff Thomas is a 52 year old physician from Florida who graduated from Harvard University. In addition to his career as a physician, Jeff has also served as their state's Governor.

When Jeff announced his candidacy, journalists began an investigation into his background. This investigation revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Election forecasters predict that Jeff has a 50% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: _____ graduated from Cal Tech.

◯ Candidate 1 (Brown)
◯ Candidate 2 (Thomas)
◯ Both candidates
◯ Neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

◯ Candidate 1 (Brown)
◯ Candidate 2 (Thomas)

Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Kristen Williams is a 54 year old political commentator from Georgia who graduated from Harvard University. In addition to her career as a political commentator, Kristen has also served as their state's Governor.

Journalists began investigating Kristen's background when she announced her intention to run. These investigations revealed allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies.

Election forecasters predict that Kristen has a 50% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Diane Wilson is a 56 year old political commentator from New Mexico who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to her career as a political commentator, Diane has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate.

When Diane announced her candidacy, journalists began an investigation into her background. These investigations revealed a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship.

Election forecasters predict that Diane has a 20% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: _____ has a 50% chance of winning the general election if they are the party's nominee.

○ Candidate 1 (Williams)
○ Candidate 2 (Wilson)
○ Both candidates
○ Neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

○ Candidate 1 (Williams)
○ Candidate 2 (Wilson)

Appendix: Randomized Vignette Characteristics

1. Corruption Involvement
    a. "the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity."
    b. "allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies."
    c. "allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over $1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars."
    d. "allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate has paid voters in exchange for their support at the ballot box."
    e. "a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship."
    f. "allegations of recent marital infidelity by a former lover."

2. Probability of Winning
    a. 20%
    b. 50%
    c. 80%
3. Gender:
    a. Male
    b. Female
4. Education
    a. Harvard University
    b. Yale University
    c. Princeton University
    d. MIT
    e. University of Pennsylvania
    f. Duke University
    g. Brown University
    h. Johns Hopkins University
    i. Stanford University
    j. Cal Tech
5. Political Experience:
    a. "served as a member of the U.S. Senate."
    b. "served as a U.S. Cabinet member. "
    c. "served as their state's Governor. "
    d. "served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives."
6. Profession:
    a. Military Officer
    b. Lawyer
    c. Physician
    d. Entrepreneur

      e. Teacher

      f. Political Commentator

7. Location 1

      a. Colorado

      b. Virginia

      c. Minnesota

      d. Michigan

      e. Arizona

      f. Wisconsin

      g. Georgia

8. Location 2

      a. North Carolina

      b. Pennsylvania

      c. Maine

      d. Nevada

      e. New Mexico

      f. New Hampshire

      g. Florida

Figure 7: **Pairwise Comparison of Support for Candidate by Treatment, with 95% Confidence Intervals, Correct Attention Checks Only**. Each box shows the probability respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed in the row when compared to a candidate whose treatment condition is listed in the column. The bracketed values are 95% confidence intervals from a constant regression using CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.
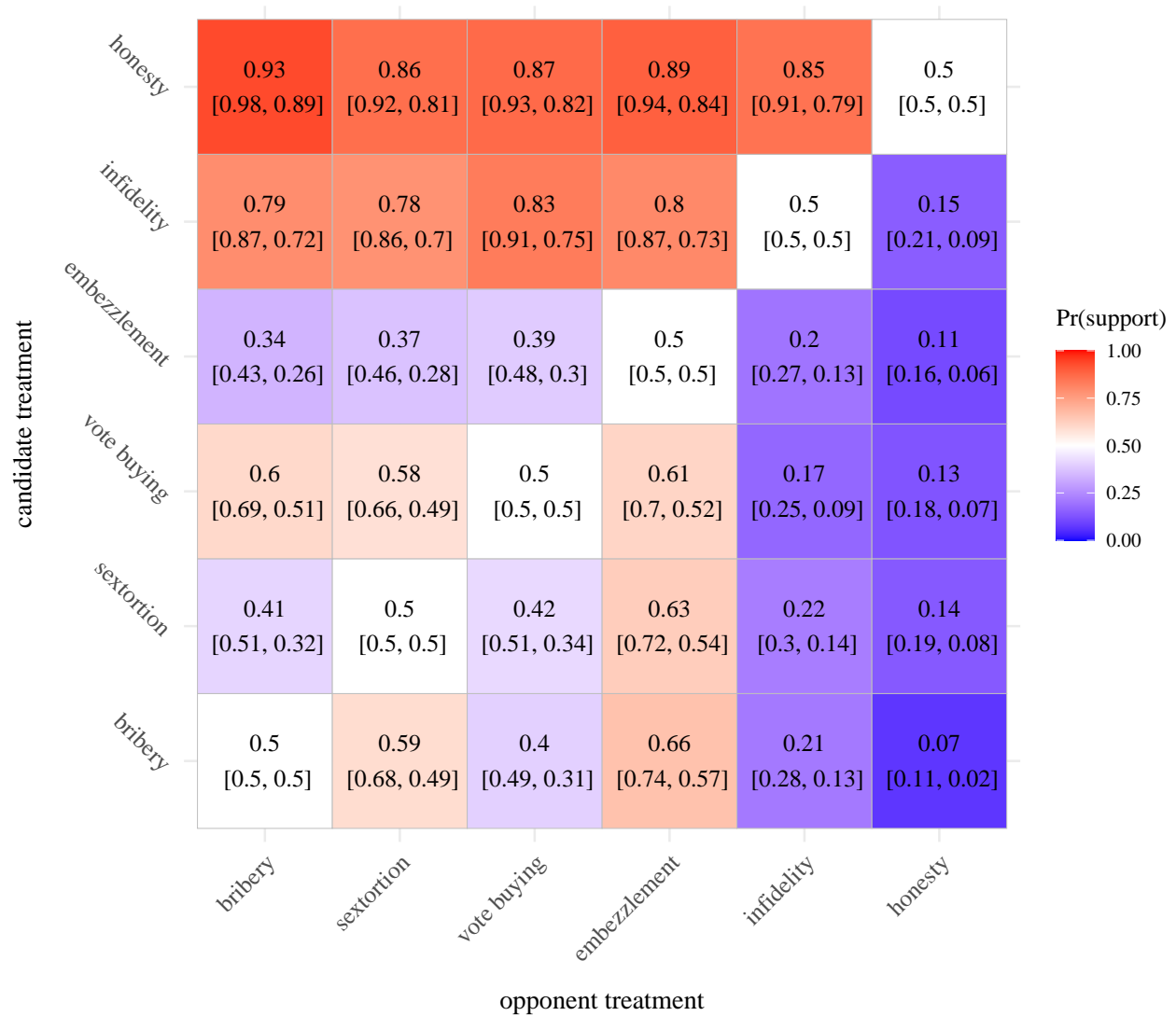
Table 3: **Treatment Effect Estimates with Gender Interactions, Correct Attention Checks Only**. The table shows the relationship between experimental treatments and respondent support for a candidate using an OLS regression model with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Intercept	0.853***	0.844***	0.844***	0.862***	0.853***
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.023)
infidelity	−0.206***	−0.194***	−0.185***	−0.206***	−0.185***
	(0.023)	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.031)
embezzlement	−0.515***	−0.504***	−0.500***	−0.515***	−0.499***
	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.022)	(0.030)
vote buying	−0.415***	−0.403***	−0.412***	−0.414***	−0.412***
	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.033)
sextortion	−0.446***	−0.435***	−0.431***	−0.446***	−0.431***
	(0.023)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.023)	(0.032)
bribery	−0.430***	−0.418***	−0.427***	−0.429***	−0.427***
	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.022)	(0.032)
Male candidate	−0.033*	−0.037*	−0.014	−0.051*	−0.032
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.034)
Male candidate x honesty		0.024			
		(0.031)			
infidelity x Male candidate			−0.042		−0.042
			(0.043)		(0.043)
embezzlement x Male candidate			−0.032		−0.032
			(0.042)		(0.042)
vote buying x Male candidate			−0.007		−0.006
			(0.048)		(0.048)
sextortion x Male candidate			−0.031		−0.030
			(0.045)		(0.045)
bribery x Male candidate			−0.006		−0.006
			(0.044)		(0.044)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	−0.058**	−0.058**	−0.058**	−0.070**	−0.070**
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.044*	0.044*	0.044*	0.030	0.030
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Pr(win) = 20% x Male candidate				0.025	0.025
				(0.033)	(0.033)
Pr(win) = 80% x Male candidate				0.029	0.029
				(0.035)	(0.035)
Num.Obs.	4450	4450	4450	4450	4450
R2	0.138	0.138	0.139	0.138	0.139
AIC	5817.4	5818.9	5826.1	5820.5	5829.2
BIC	5881.4	5889.3	5922.1	5897.3	5938.1

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Table 4: OLS Estimates for Figure 3

	(1)
honesty | Female candidate	0.790
	(0.018)
honesty | Male candidate	0.790
	(0.019)
infidelity | Female candidate	0.618
	(0.021)
infidelity | Male candidate	0.578
	(0.022)
embezzlement | Female candidate	0.371
	(0.020)
embezzlement | Male candidate	0.333
	(0.020)
vote buying | Female candidate	0.440
	(0.022)
vote buying | Male candidate	0.427
	(0.023)
sextortion | Female candidate	0.428
	(0.022)
sextortion | Male candidate	0.378
	(0.022)
bribery | Female candidate	0.421
	(0.022)
bribery | Male candidate	0.405
	(0.021)
Num.Obs.	5824

Table 5: OLS Models for Figure 4

	Male Resp.	Female Resp.	All Resp.
Intercept	0.794***	0.811***	0.801***
	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.020)
infidelity	−0.205***	−0.157***	−0.179***
	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.025)
embezzlement	−0.450***	−0.400***	−0.424***
	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.025)
vote buying	−0.369***	−0.326***	−0.347***
	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.026)
sextortion	−0.366***	−0.377***	−0.371***
	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.026)
bribery	−0.390***	−0.345***	−0.365***
	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.025)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	−0.032	−0.082***	−0.059***
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.015)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.048*	0.001	0.024
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.016)
Male candidate	−0.005	−0.050**	−0.029*
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.013)
Male candidate x honesty	0.006	0.051	0.029
	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.029)
Male respondent			0.004
			(0.004)
Num.Obs.	2816	2984	5800
R2	0.099	0.103	0.100
AIC	3815.6	4029.3	7833.9
BIC	3881.0	4095.3	7913.9

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Figure 8: **Marginal Effect of Candidate Gender on Support by Partisanship, with Marginal Density of Partisanship**. The figure indicates the estimated effect of a candidate being male on support for a candidate, with 95% FDR Confidence Intervals corrected for multiple comparisons. The model underlying these estimates is shown in Appendix Table 9 under the column heading *All*. The marginal density of partisanship in the sample is shown along the top margin of the plot.
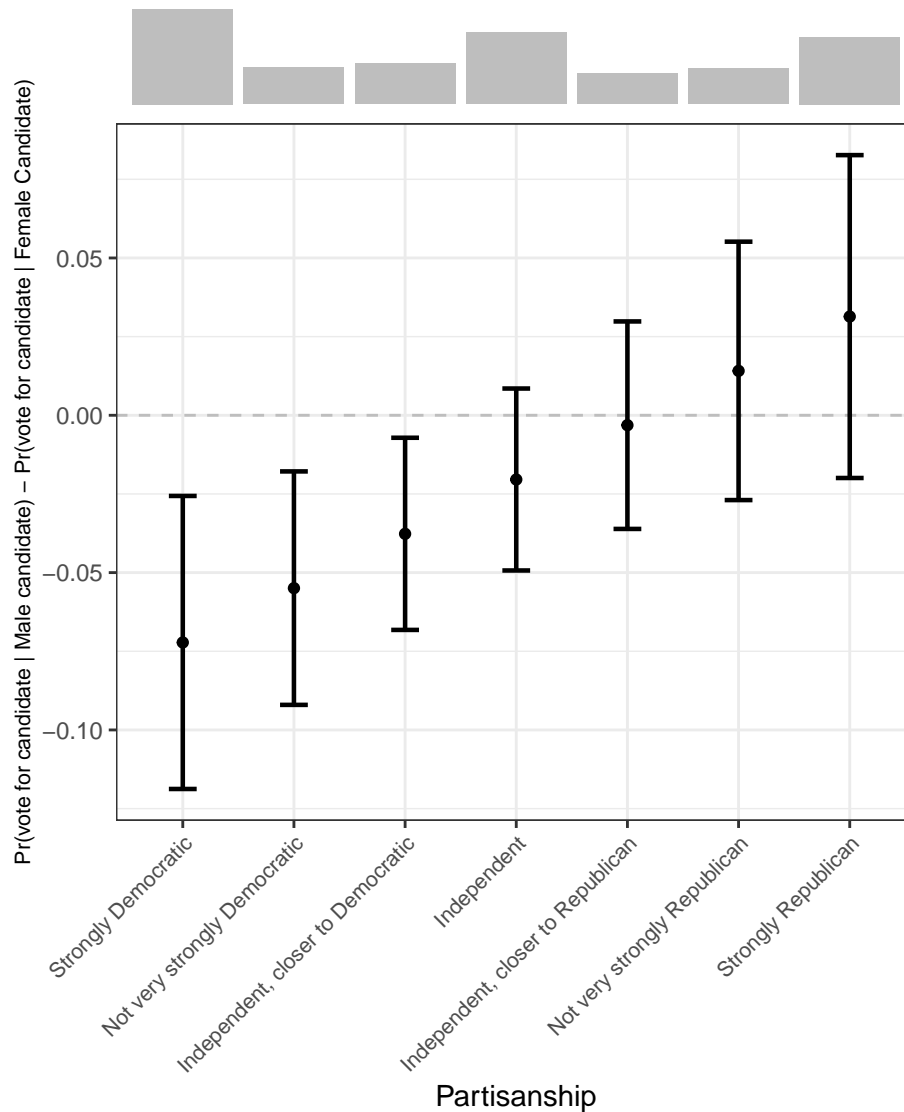
Table 6: OLS Estimates for Figure 5

	All Data	Same Treatment
Pr(win general election) = 20% | Female candidate	0.470	0.325
	(0.014)	(0.045)
Pr(win general election) = 20% | Male candidate	0.443	0.362
	(0.014)	(0.047)
Pr(win general election) = 50% | Female candidate	0.526	0.581
	(0.015)	(0.049)
Pr(win general election) = 50% | Male candidate	0.485	0.523
	(0.015)	(0.048)
Pr(win general election) = 80% | Female candidate	0.545	0.649
	(0.015)	(0.045)
Pr(win general election) = 80% | Male candidate	0.530	0.570
	(0.015)	(0.054)
Num.Obs.	5824	642

Table 7: OLS Models for Figure 6

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
honesty | Female cand.	0.794***	0.767***	0.820***
	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.036)
infidelity | Female cand.	0.655***	0.568***	0.612***
	(0.030)	(0.036)	(0.048)
embezzlement | Female cand.	0.402***	0.326***	0.371***
	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.044)
vote buying | Female cand.	0.463***	0.426***	0.409***
	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.048)
sextortion | Female cand.	0.401***	0.433***	0.484***
	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.053)
bribery | Female cand.	0.441***	0.411***	0.395***
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.050)
honesty | Male cand.	0.773***	0.820***	0.780***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.044)
infidelity | Male cand.	0.606***	0.592***	0.475***
	(0.032)	(0.035)	(0.054)
embezzlement | Male cand.	0.296***	0.362***	0.360***
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.047)
vote buying | Male cand.	0.420***	0.452***	0.400***
	(0.033)	(0.043)	(0.053)
sextortion | Male cand.	0.329***	0.393***	0.456***
	(0.030)	(0.037)	(0.051)
bribery | Male cand.	0.381***	0.453***	0.378***
	(0.030)	(0.037)	(0.046)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104
R2	0.553	0.546	0.549
AIC	3598.5	2811.4	1514.1
BIC	3675.1	2884.5	1579.2

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Table 8: Average Support for Candidates, by Treatment and Respondent Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
infidelity	0.672***	0.580***	0.576***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.044)
embezzlement	0.389***	0.345***	0.398***
	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.039)
vote buying	0.481***	0.436***	0.434***
	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.041)
sextortion	0.406***	0.418***	0.505***
	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.042)
bribery	0.452***	0.433***	0.417***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.041)
Male candidate	−0.058**	0.024	−0.036
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.027)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	−0.066**	−0.058*	−0.051
	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.034)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.033	0.020	0.005
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.036)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104
R2	0.556	0.547	0.550
AIC	3574.0	2797.5	1507.3
BIC	3632.9	2853.8	1557.3

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Table 9: **Treatment Effect Estimates by Respondent Party**. The table shows the relationship between experimental treatment effects and partisanship by estimating the AMCE separately for partisan subsamples (columns 1-3) and for the combined sample with an interaction effect between candidate gender and partisanship on a seven-point scale (column 4). The model in Column 4 is the basis for the marginal effect shown in Figure 8.

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	All
Intercept	0.827***	0.794***	0.832***	0.838***
	(0.025)	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.019)
infidelity	−0.155***	−0.214***	−0.256***	−0.193***
	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.050)	(0.021)
embezzlement	−0.437***	−0.449***	−0.434***	−0.440***
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.047)	(0.020)
vote buying	−0.346***	−0.358***	−0.398***	−0.360***
	(0.033)	(0.038)	(0.047)	(0.022)
sextortion	−0.420***	−0.376***	−0.327***	−0.386***
	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.050)	(0.021)
bribery	−0.375***	−0.361***	−0.415***	−0.377***
	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.045)	(0.021)
Male candidate	−0.058**	0.024	−0.036	−0.072***
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.020)
Male Candidate x Party ID				0.017**
				(0.006)
Party ID (7 point scale)				−0.008**
				(0.003)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	−0.066**	−0.058*	−0.051	−0.059***
	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.034)	(0.015)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.033	0.020	0.005	0.024
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.016)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104	5824
R2	0.112	0.095	0.099	0.101
AIC	3574.0	2797.5	1507.3	7858.6
BIC	3632.9	2853.8	1557.3	7938.7

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001